

MARRIAGE WITH A DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER.

A review of a pamphlet on the above-named subject, by Professor Hirschfelder.

Legislatures, like the individuals of whom they are composed, on two important subjects, depute other men to think for them; matters relating to health of body or mind are, therefore, relegated by such assemblies to certain persons who, for a consideration, kindly undertake to stand sponsor for them. The evil consequences of such a condition of things exceed the power of human ken to estimate, but they will best realize them who have experienced the *blandishments* of an average step-parent. Professor Hirschfelder has given his readers the benefit of his intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew language, and of his extensive research in relation to the subject of the pamphlet. The force of his argument may be said to culminate, as it originates, in one weighty prohibition, "Thou shalt not take a wife to her sister, to cause jealousy or enmity . . . in her lifetime."—Lev. xviii. 18. Prior to entering on the discussion of the subject, the author adverts to the circumstance of Abraham having married his half-sister, as recorded in Gen. xx. 12, and to that of Jacob having, under exceptional circumstances, married one sister during the lifetime of the other; and this the writer does in order to show that, anterior to the promulgation of the Mosaic law, there was little or no regard paid to considerations of consanguinity. The chief difficulty of the question arises from the fact of a man being forbidden to marry the widow of his brother (Lev. xviii. 16, and xx. 21). This was a fundamental law, admitting, however, of an exception, in the case of a married brother dying childless (Deut. xxv. 5-10). It would appear that we must be content in this matter to repose in the wisdom of Him who ordained the laws, and to reflect on our own ignorance.

It appears from Gen. xxviii. 6-11, that the custom of a man marrying the widow of a deceased brother, when that brother died childless, obtained in the days of the patriarchs; this custom was subsequently engrafted into the Mosaic code. Moses, therefore, in view of the existing law which forbade such a union, explains the reason for this exception—"And it shall be that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is

dead, that his name be not wiped out of Israel."—Deut. xxv. 6. The author comments on the practice of "loosing the shoe" on the part of the widow, when repudiated by her brother-in-law, in the following terms: "The loosing the shoe had its inception from the custom of a man taking possession of landed property by going to it and standing on it in his shoes, thus asserting his right to it; when property was renounced, therefore, it was customary to transfer the shoe to the new owner (see Ruth iv. 7). This custom also prevailed among the ancient Germans. When the shoe was removed by the widow, the act indicated that the brother-in-law forfeited his right to the property of the deceased; the widow was also to *spit out before him* (not to 'spit in his face,' as in the authorized version); this spitting out before a man was an Oriental mode of signifying extreme detestation or contempt—the practice obtains among all classes of Arabians at the present day." Inasmuch as an attempt has been made by an eminent but heterodox scholar, to obviate the difficulty attaching to this question by tampering with the sacred text, the effort on his part has led Professor Hirschfelder to give Biblical students some valuable information relative to versions of Scripture which confirm the reading of the Hebrew text; the Greek version (the Septuagint), the author observes, is generally supposed to have been begun in the time of the early Ptolemies, about 280 or 285 B.C.; *the translation of the Pentateuch was executed first*, and the translation of the other books was undertaken at uncertain intervals subsequently. Aristobulus, who lived in the second century B.C., says that "*the Pentateuch was translated very early*." This version was highly esteemed both by the Egyptian and Palestine Jews, who read it in their synagogues; the version perfectly agrees with the present Hebrew text in regard to Lev. xviii. 18. The Chaldee version, commonly known as the Targum, also confirms the accuracy of the Hebrew text; it dates from the commencement of the Christian era.

In addition to all the foregoing testimony, we have that of the Syriac version, the rendering of which agrees word for word with the Hebrew, so that we have in this case, three independent witnesses to the genuineness of the Hebrew text, and each of them of the highest value. The reviewer eliminates the *testimony* accumulated in this